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Critic or Creator: Wyndham Lewis and *The Childermass*

John Constable

[This short essay was delivered on the 11th of March 1992 as a paper in a series of public seminars held at London University's Centre for English Studies under the title "The Sociology of the Text". I am grateful to Peter Caracciolo and Warren Chernaik for inviting me to speak on that occasion.]

This account is an episode of a larger narrative in which Lewis's development is charted as a function of, amongst other variables, the audiences which he was addressing, and, I argue, therefore, controlled by. My reconstruction supposes that the history of a writer's relations with his audience can be seen as the continuation and consequence of a process of education which is, very broadly speaking, common to all members of a social group. The verbal interaction of most individuals begins with its mother, then its father, broadens to include its immediate family, then children of its own age, and so on through school and into general society. The process of education can be described as a means by which an individual is brought under a progressively wider range of social contingencies.

A child is gradually brought under the conditioning influence of the verbal activity of individuals with whom the child has less and less history in common. It learns with its mother, then broadens to father, and so on through into the adult state where it is able to range from a very private form of utterance useful with domestic intimates, right up to the most public forms where individuals recognize that they have only the most general conditioning influences in common.

Writing is a variety of verbal activity, and is also gradually brought under broader audience control. A writer begins by addressing its mother, or at least some intimate, most likely a parent. At some point during this family phase the individual will become part of its own audience, at much the same time, it is likely, as the habit of self-observation, i.e. the self, is constructed in the child. As the writer moves into society it will be progressively required to modify its utterance to respect the differing nature of the interaction. With written material we are likely to think publication the point at which social contingencies begin to bear upon a writer. But important reader interactions have been going on long before this, and we can even say that there is no pre-public stage, since the individual is always monitoring its own verbal production in a manner which is in fact the product, at least in part, of social conditioning. The sociology of the text starts a great way back. But there is, of course, good reason to think of print publication being important. It usually marks a larger shift in the author's audience relation than has occurred before.

This will be seen to bear on Lewis when we remember that he, alone of the Joyce, Pound, Eliot group, did not attend university, but an art school, the Slade, a major difference in his audience conditioning. Put bluntly, Lewis was not as fully weaned into verbal publicity through the literary educational process, and as a consequence retained restricted audience models for much longer than was the case with the other "men of 1914".¹ I believe this point of comparison will also hold in relation to other writers, such as Lawrence, a university man, or Virginia Woolf, the pupil of the intellectual drawing-room.

But this deficiency of Lewis's would not, probably, have made very much difference if his family conditioning had not also been unusually narrow. His father abandoned the family when Lewis was eleven, and does not seem to have been greatly interested before that. In the normal course of events the family self is revised producing a socially conditioned version, but Lewis's education was not normal. His early years were spent in the US, and later, in England, he was schooled, first at a County school in Bedford, and later at

Rugby up to the age of sixteen. His Rugby period was unhappy. In the late forties or early fifties he told one friend, Melville Hardiment, that he had been very lonely and once given a study hardly ever left it.² Though separated from the original conditioning cultures which had formed them, none of the other modernists were exiled at so early an age, or exposed to such a blend of different national and social trainings. Diverse training will be weak training, and in such a case as Lewis's it is reasonable to suppose that the family influence would come to dominate since it did not meet an effective competitor in the "public" educational practices of a society. I suggest that the result of this impoverished listener training was that up until the mid nineteen-twenties, Lewis had difficulty in taking into account the likely requirements of a "strange audience", and was in effect writing both for his mother and for a self constructed by the restricted family situation.

This inexperience led him, I believe, to make, amongst other things, errors of judgment in planning his publication schedule in 1926-7. Attempts to correct these errors, by the publication of the *Childermass*,³ further compounded the difficulties, and initiated the catastrophic deterioration in his work which becomes evident after 1932. Almost all writers will face audience difficulties, but Lewis's case is particularly worthy of study because he was so bad at dealing with them. His problems in the mid-twenties arose as a direct consequence of the way in which his writing took shape in the years succeeding the first war, and particularly after 1922. It is not uncommon for writers to toy with the idea of assembling all their works to form one coherent whole. Pope's "Magnum Opus", and Wordsworth's still more ambitious project come to mind. Lewis is perhaps unusual in conceiving of this output in this way almost from the start. The early years of the nineteen-twenties were spent constructing what he hoped would be a comprehensive display of his opinions, casting some sections of it as literary criticism, some as social philosophy. Other related, but perhaps not connected sections, were to appear as fiction. It appears from a draft letter of 2 February 1925 to Alec Waugh, now in the

Lewis collection of Cornell University Library, that a version of the book was completed early in that year: "Here is the complete mss of the book, *The Man of the World*".⁴ At present the constitution of that manuscript is not known, and altogether we know really very little of the details of what Lewis wanted to do at this time. The hypothesis which I shall assume here is that the major works published between 1926 and 1930 are new books built around seed crystals, some very substantial, taken from the volume sent to Alec Waugh. It has long been thought likely that "The Man of the World" also contained fictional elements, but the best evidence for Lewis's plans that we know of, a letter to Ezra Pound of 29 April 1925, seems to contradict such a suggestion. After describing his various volumes of criticism, philosophy and sociology as "longer than War & Peace, Ulysses & so on", Lewis adds:

Then there are two vols. (not of course part of the Man of the World) of *The Apes of God* (fiction) the first of which is nearly done. *Joint* (sketched & partly done) *Archie* (complete, thirty or forty thousand).—*The Great Fish Jesus Christ* (45 thousand).⁵

The letter is, at present, very confusing, and this passage is the only which seems to yield a readily intelligible statement: the fiction is discrete from the criticism. But if this is so, it is very strange that the books chosen as comparisons for the critical sections should both be works of fiction—"War & Peace, Ulysses", and odder that a catalogue should move without difficulty from non-fictional parts of one project to the fictional parts of another, as if they were logical neighbours. The words "not of course part of the Man of the World" are, according to Materer's edition, an insertion, which suggests that Lewis was far from sure of the organization of his scheme, and that it was not until he looked over the letter that he bothered to make fiction and philosophy distinct. That "of course" makes one very suspicious. It seems to me that although the explicit statement of this letter forbids one from seeing the "Apes of God" material, in which I include *The Childermass* since it is a development of a section in "Joint",⁶ we can nevertheless take this as evidence supporting a

view of Lewis as developing what he would have held to be a single thesis in a number of differing genre. At the very least it suggests that they are of equal importance.

Though the exact nature of his plan is not clear, the fictional parts may plausibly be assumed to have begun life, in the early twenties, as elements of a very large scheme to be published under the title "Joint" or, possibly, "Master Joint". The title "*Apes of God*", mentioned in the letter, came later. Further details of the relation of philosophy and fiction may be found in the fact that this title is almost certainly taken from an epigram of Nietzsche's, entitled "Man the Comedian of the World".⁷ This is not the place to discuss the "Joint" papers in detail, but I will say that it appears that the materials which went towards *The Apes of God*, and those which became *The Childermass*, were to appear as different departments in a structure which was also to contain a section on war (probably a reworking of the "Crowd-Master" pieces first published in *Blast* 2), and some other narratives. As a form this would have been the sort of satire which looks to the "*lanx satura*", the mixed dish, for its etymological justification. That this bundle of interlocking and juxtaposed narratives would have related to the discursive philosophical extravaganza of "The Man of the World" is clear. Indeed, I think we can go further and say that these two parts seemed to Lewis to form one project. I am inclined to think that, if asked, he would have held them to be distinct, but in the process of composition would have believed them to be unified.

The practicalities of publication necessitated breaking these great bundles of texts into separate, conventional, single topic volumes, and the sequence in which these parts were published caused an important discrepancy between the public's image of Lewis, and his self-image. He felt himself to be an encyclopaedist ("The Man of the World" was to be a compendium of principles with which to meet the modern environment: Enquire within upon everything), but his universal interests were arranged in a definite hierarchy, some parts lying closer to his essential self, as he would have seen it. For the purposes of

this brief paper I am going to reduce this hierarchy to the simple predominance of creative over critical, but this must be taken as shorthand for a much more complicated rank structure. The original unity of his project, and perhaps more importantly the rank of each section, was clear to Lewis in the sense that he was the subject at the centre of a great network of interests. The “Man of the World”, and its associated fiction, was, I think, an attempt to publish a group of texts whose surprising juxtaposition of diverse subjects and genre would be a model of his adventurous intellectual activity. But this integration was hidden by the recasting, and, more importantly, the transformations meant that Lewis’s own synchronic view of his output (the map of his mind) was not at all evident to a public observing the issue of his work as a sequence. Sequential publication also meant that the later parts were revised under the pressure of the reception accorded to the earlier parts, an interesting point which I do not, unfortunately, have space to consider here.

This dissonance between Lewis’s self-image and the image the public saw presented by the sequence of his books would not have been so acute if the criticism had not appeared first. His difficulty was, I suspect, that the fictional sections required much revision, but the criticism, being straightforwardly detachable, could be prepared for the press with comparatively little trouble. His three big books appeared within an eighteen month period: *The Art of Being Ruled* on 11 February 1926, *The Lion and the Fox* on 6 January 1927, and *Time and Western Man* on 29 September 1927. *The Childermass* did not reach the public until 21 June 1928, and the *Apes of God* two years later than that on 3 June 1930. “Joint”, the parent, framing, narrative for both these sections was abandoned entirely. The point matters because although one need not take too seriously Lewis’s description of himself as being “underground” in the early and mid-twenties, his pre-war celebrity did lapse in the period 1921–25 and as a consequence the character given him by the critical books was not seen against his past; he acquired, unwittingly, a new identity. To the readers of the literary journals where his books were reviewed, and to those who actually

read his books, the sequence of publication, 1926–1930, suggested that he was a critic who also published fiction, rather late in the day.

In 1926, when *The Art of Being Ruled* appeared, the first of his major books to do so, the celebrity of *Tarr* was long past and Lewis had not held an exhibition for five years. Some reviewers felt they had to remind their readers of his distinguished early activities, most were not aware of them, or thought them hardly worth mentioning. An issue of the *Enemy* appeared, then two more large critical books, *The Lion and the Fox* and *Time and Western Man*, then another issue of the *Enemy*, all between January and September 1927, and all confirming the classification of critic.⁸

Lewis's response to reviewers who were either ignorant of his earlier achievements, or had forgotten them, was to assemble a selection of his early short stories, most of them written before the war, which he revised for publication as *The Wild Body*.⁹ But it was not sufficiently massive to make much of an impression on the now well established and solidifying reputation. The *American Bookman* supplies a representative remark: "Wyndham Lewis used to be professionally a painter; then he became a literary critic and philosopher; and now he has written a book of stories".¹⁰ In the *Aberdeen Press*, 6 February 1928, readers were told "Here is Mr. Wyndham Lewis, our latest combatant philosopher, as fictionist. But Mr. Lewis is like Mr. Bernard Shaw, unable to let us have the jam without some little didactic pill stuck in it."¹¹ A very damaging comparison, even at that date, and the implication is clearly that the didacticism is a result of the philosophical interests. Lewis had himself highlighted the matter by including the theoretical essays "Inferior Religions" and "The Meaning of the Wild Body", and could have had no reason for surprise when reviewers such as Amabel Williams-Ellis in *Vogue*, complained that "The author in his proper person will keep peeping round his own Punch-and-Judy show and explaining to the reader what he meant by the last story."¹² As part of the struggle to establish himself as a creative writer with readers who were convinced, or happy to pretend that they were convinced, that the production

of criticism was sufficient evidence of sterility, the publication of the *Wild Body* was not much of a success. Only a month after publication Lewis seems to have realized that this book on its own would not be adequate for his purposes, and he drafted a circular printed for Chatto in late December 1927, and reprinted three times in the period up to March 1928, a total of 12,158 copies.¹³ This document provides a biographical note summarizing his career and emphasizing his multiple interests, but doubly emphasizing their hierarchy:

[...] it is not as critic or as a publicist that Mr. Lewis considers himself destined to be known finally. So far in the creative field he has one hastily written novel, *Tarr*, and a book of short stories to his credit. Published, or in preparation, and partly published, he has to his account four or five considerable critical works. These, which would suffice for the life-work of another man, have all appeared or been partly published in the last two years. But he has had in preparation for some time an important work of creative fiction, which has been maturing slowly in the midst of his other activities, *The Childermass* [...] The first part of this will be ready in the early part of the year [...] We shall not be able to finally judge the potentialities of this extraordinary personality until these large-scale creative literary works begin to appear.¹⁴

Apart from this announcement of *The Childermass*, a new “corrected” edition of *Tarr* is described as “under contemplation”. In this context the *Wild Body*, which otherwise appears a feckless and panicky response, can be seen as ground preparation. 1928 was to be a very substantial year, with two books, one to establish his claim to be a current writer of imaginative power, *The Childermass*, and another, the reprint of *Tarr*, which would show that this was no recent development. Charles Prentice’s letters to Lewis, of which I have read the Chatto file copies held at Reading University Library, suggest that this latter was intended to be a very rapid job, probably as a herald, certainly as a companion, to *The Childermass*. Had all gone well Lewis would have issued nothing else but three books of fiction in eight months, and the sequence would have followed his own development, thus reinstating the history lost during the post-war years. As a culmination of this process would appear his long-meditated master-work. Things did not go well with *Tarr*. A quarrel over

money with Chatto left things too far behind to allow the original plan to be carried through, so Lewis cut his losses and revised the book in greater detail with an eye on the contemporary market, the finished item appearing in December.

The plan for 1928 may not have gone off with the jitter cracking bang that was hoped, but the books were out. *Tarr*, as a reprint, was not a "review" sensation, but became a modest financial success, and for many years it was the volume which introduced new readers to Lewis. The *Childermass*, however, was a commercial failure. Chatto printed 2,500 copies of the regular edition (there was also a limited edition of 231 signed copies), and bound 1,250 of them pre-publication. The next binding after publication in June was a group of 100 copies in September, and then there was a gap. On 2 June 1931 they bound another fifty copies, and on 3 January 1936 another fifty. By June of the following year they decided the book was effectively dead and recalled their stock of 1,078 quires from the binders and used them, ignominiously, for packing.

On the other hand it was a widely reviewed book, being discussed in just over forty articles in 1928. I should preface my remarks on the review history with a few declarations. My research in the study of the materials is advanced but not complete. I have traced 117 items referring to Lewis in 1928, and have consulted over eighty of these. My coverage of British reviews is good, that of American reviews much less so. I don't think this altogether devalues my remarks, though nothing would be less surprising than to find that they need revision in the light of fresh evidence.¹⁵

The vast majority of the notices traced and consulted so far appeared in the copy hungry popular press, and in fact it is one of the oddities of the *Childermass* that it received so little attention in the weeklies, monthlies or quarterlies who had been reliably discussing his critical books at length. As you would expect, the reviews for the first month or so are mostly from London papers. The basic theme of all these pieces is difficulty. I shall run through a few in chronological order.

Nation & Athenaeum: Raymond Mortimer: "the design is incomprehensible".¹⁶

Observer: Gerald Gould: "so obviously nonsense".¹⁷

Daily News: Gerald Gould (again): "If it was Mr. Wyndham Lewis's ambition to produce the silliest book since 'Ulysses', he has perhaps scored a success."¹⁸

Star: Howell Davies: "I really do not know whether 'The Childermass' is a very good book or a very bad one."¹⁹

Sunday Times: Ralph Straus: "I confess I do not know what to say".²⁰

If we are looking to see whether Lewis had succeeded in putting across a new image of himself, one more representative of his multiple interests, pieces of this kind are very little use at all. But there is a good deal of intelligent comment in the yellow-press, indeed in the case of *The Childermass* it is predominantly in the dailies. There is a mass of evidence on this point but I will simply illustrate it with the first two pieces of this kind. The *Birmingham Post* provided the first intelligent summary and review.²¹ Their writer had no great difficulty in seeing the basic scheme, or of understanding that the Joyce sections are deliberate echoes for satiric purposes (one London review actually referred to this as "Wyndham Lewis parodying something American"²²). He also sees how much Joyce is present in the book: "In his style also, Mr. Lewis provides a parallel to Joyce; though possibly original research has led him to the effort for an imitative actuality in the pages devoted to the clown figures." One has grumbles about this of course, but compared to Gould and Straus it can only be welcome.

The following day, 7 July 1928, a brief review appeared in *The North Mail & Newcastle Chronicle*. This reviewer begins by commenting on the oddity of grouping Poppy Bloom's *Passionate Kisses*,²³ the other book discussed in the article, and Lewis's *Childermass* under the single term "fiction". What is more, she or he adds that Lewis "does at any rate make you say to yourself 'If I were this man I should indeed act thus and say thus', but not even the most unsophisticated reader could, I imagine, say of Poppy Bloom's characters, 'That is what I would have done were I the woman'." I am far from setting this up as

a model, but, considering the sort of paper in which it appeared, surely it is remarkable that the artificial *Childermass* should be found to ring true and *Pasionate Kisses* false.

If one reads the reviews, as I have done, in chronological order, it is very striking to see the acuity of the writers for the provincial papers juxtaposed with the complacent ignorance of senior London writers, who speak with one voice, or rather seem to mime to their reader's preconceptions. Speculation on the matter is tempting. Perhaps writers in these places were not under mass audience control, and did not have to feign triviality. In a small audience readers with intellectual interests will tend make up a larger proportion of the readership, and it is possible that they would be sufficiently powerful to control the character of a paper. A national, selling in very large numbers, would have more intellectuals among its readers overall, but the proportion of the total, and consequently their power, would be smaller. Another possibility is that the reviewers, working for the provincial papers were younger and more likely to appreciate modern work, and, most importantly, not yet themselves under the full control of the newspaper reading audience. They may, in fact, have been residents in London, like Geoffrey Grigson, who spent several years working for *The Yorkshire Post* in the thirties.²⁴ Suggestions of this nature are very difficult to test without several lifetime's research. Workers in the humanities must face the fact that interesting microscopic questions of this kind cannot be rigorously framed because the exhaustive historical investigation necessary would consume an unacceptably large part of the national wealth. I am far from grumbling about this, incidentally. History is narcissistic activity, even when self-flagellant, and a financial limit on it seems quite fortunate.

Even given the difficulties of assessing these hypotheses, I am prepared to venture an opinion on the basis of my own research. To limit a study of the reception of a work to the readily accessible, and, one would think, representative materials in the national dailies may be to inadvertently ignore a signifi-

cant part of the reading public. The highbrow world is represented by the weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies. The philistine average finds its voice in the London dailies, but there will be a group, a sort of "thinking mankind in the street", neither national intelligentsia (university or bohemian) nor national average, who is perhaps only ever represented in the provincial papers.

I argued earlier that the publication of the *Wild Body*, *The Childermass*, and *Tarr*, the three books that Lewis issued between December 1927 and December 1928, were hurried out because the reviews showed that Lewis was regarded solely as a critic. Together they form a determined effort to reassert his value as a master of imaginative prose. The reception of the *Wild Body* has been briefly described, and found to picture Lewis as a Percycome-lately fictionist, a philosopher choosing to write in fables. *Tarr* was not widely reviewed, though its sales can be presumed to have done something towards reasserting Lewis as creator. Only the *Childermass* remains to be considered. We must begin by setting aside the provincial response, which, however, valuable for other approaches, represents only a small proportion of the public, and even though very favourable would carry little weight in the literary world. Lewis, by the way, used these pieces very often in his advertisements, and was ridiculed for it. A satire in *This Quarter* presents Lewis saying "Did ye ever see the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* and the *Glasgow Herald*? No? Ah well... better not ...".²⁵ The snobbism in modernism should be remembered more often.

The provincials, then, can be left out of the consideration. If we turn to the mass circulation dailies and weeklies it is immediately evident that this is a negative response. Mortimer, Gould, Straus, and their ilk, already quoted, rejected the book as incomprehensible. We can therefore discard them as irrelevant to our question. Even someone generally sympathetic to Lewis, L.P. Hartley, in *The Saturday Review*, at this time still a respectable paper, remarked on *Childermass*'s "vast unintelligible bulk" and found it "too abstract, too mental" and lamented that "Had it a firmer anchor in the heart, it would not go

drifting about so far above the head.”²⁶ One imagines him turning with delight to Poppy Bloom’s *Passionate Kisses*. Perhaps I do him an injustice.

We are now left with the intellectual press, of which I have seen eight pieces: Cyril Connolly in the *New Statesman*, Mary Agnes Hamilton in *Time and Tide*, Alan Clutton-Brock in the *Times Literary Supplement*, W.H. Helm in the *English Review*, E.E. Phare (later Duncan-Jones) in the *Cambridge Review*, T.H. White in *Granta*, J.D. Beresford in the *New Adelphi*, and Lawrence Morris’s review of the New York edition in the *New Republic*.²⁷ Had these all been ecstatic they would hardly have done much to alter the prevailing opinion. In fact most of them confirm it.

Connolly: “It is obvious that the present section is really only a dramatisation of the ideas of Mr. Lewis in *Time and Western Man*”.

Hamilton: “For his powers as a critic and as a philosopher I have great admiration. [...] But the first part of *The Childermass* [...] I have found almost impossible to read.”

Clutton-Brock: “We cannot say that there is any beauty in Mr. Lewis’s prose, but that it is extravagantly expressive there can be no doubt. [...] Whether there should be so much expression in what is after all a *conte philosophique* is a doubtful question.”

Helm’s review is so idiosyncratic that it cannot be properly included here except as comic relief: “To many Agnostics its treatment of a future state and the judgment of souls will afford an example of deplorable taste, while to any conceivable kind of Christian it will be ribald blasphemy. ‘Imaginative Fiction’ it is justly called on the wrapper, and the adverb ‘highly’ might have been prefixed without the least unverity.” As far as I know this is the only pure religious criticism of the book, an interesting point when compared with the sort of “neo-christian” press which greeted the *Human Age*.²⁸

Phare’s review is quite in a class of its own. I recommend it, by the way, not only as the best review, but as one of the best criticisms yet published. Her strong point is that she is able to accept the book as satire, in which case it

is not defective as fiction because it has an argument, or because this argument is buttressed by Lewis's critical writing.

She also recognizes, as no other critic has, that the manner, most evident in the opening section, is functional to the overall plan. She speaks of the "strangeness not romantic" given to everyday objects by Lewis's "slow motion camera" style, and adds "With the achievement of detachment comes the possibility of a point of view upon the age." Those who think the simplicity of the *Human Age* superior to "flashy" *Childermass* might consider that argument.

As a comparison to Phare's subtle appreciation of the mechanism of satire we might turn to T.H. White's remark: "*Gulliver's Travels* is a book of the first quality because it may be taken both ways, as a story or satire; *The Childermass* may not be a great book because it neglects this quality."

Beresford's is a very friendly piece indeed and praises C. at the expense of *Ulysses*. But why he should do so isn't really very clear, since he thinks that the first half of the book is about sixty pages too long, and the descriptive power is damaged by "needlessly perplexing and perfectly useless futurist methods in the matters of punctuation and redundancy." Phare's remark provides the relevant counter-argument, but I do myself wonder if the pressure to produce "creative" work caused the opening section to be somewhat distended. There is, Paul Edwards tell me, evidence to support this contention in the drafts of the book, where the opening sections are very much shorter and clearly intended as a brief framing narrative for the debates.

Morris quite straightforwardly sees the book in relation to the criticism: "He has published 'The Art of Being Ruled', 'The Lion and the Fox', 'Time and Western Man'; and is now summing up the case—indeed, all the cases—in 'The Childermass'." The rest of this piece is really a review of those books, and it is only at the end that we find Morris complaining that "instead of the direct, vigorous prose Mr. Lewis wielded in 'The Art of Being Ruled' and 'Time and Western Man' he has written his new master-piece in a mannered,

self-conscious style."

If we may judge from this sample *The Childermass* failed to bring about the changes in image that Lewis desired. Moreover, by publishing his first major piece of new fiction since *Tarr* at this time, when the impact of the three critical works was still reverberating, Lewis effectively made sure that it would be obliterated. It might have done better if it were not so closely tied to the themes of his preceding books. Readers as flexible as E.E. Phare are unusual, and a book with a high level of discursive debate in it is unlikely to be thought "creative" by many, especially when juxtaposed with nonfictional works on the same themes. It was not until the early 1930s that these critical works were sufficiently distant not to overshadow any new publication. Consequently the label he bears today is "Apes of God Lewis".

There was one other important consequence of the policy Lewis adopted in 1928 that should be considered, because it sets the scene for his dismal performance during the thirties. I should perhaps come absolutely clean and say that the only things I find interesting about Lewis's work after *Snooty Baronet*²⁹ are the reasons it becomes so bad. The complaints of Beresford and Morris represent, I suggest, a disillusioned public. As a critic Lewis had a high media profile largely because his opinions were mistaken as "reactionary", and the newspaper reviews tend to welcome Lewis-the-critic as an anti-modernist. It is orthodox in the modernist period to believe that such opinions are in the vast majority, so Lewis appeared to be strongly reinforced by his society (indeed by many sections of society: the Catholic press began to show an interest in his work almost immediately), and in 1927 probably is so because the Gould/Straus reader is not aware that Lewis is himself a modernist. As a result of this apparent populism, or popular reactionary philistinism (the Catholic connection cannot have helped) Lewis incurred the contempt of intellectuals, particularly those abroad, such as the editors of *transition*, who described the British press as "no doubt over-whelmed at seeing its own senile ideas illuminated with so much fireworks."³⁰

As I hope I have shown, Lewis tried to change this image and exalt his standing by publishing a text with strong claims to be imaginative, and as modern as any of his contemporaries. This venture was a disaster because

- a. The existing image was very strong.
- b. Because his fiction in any case appeared to embody the same reactionary opinions and therefore confirmed the continental avant-garde in thinking him the darling of the philistine majority.
- c. Because the reviewers of 1926-7 who applauded the critical work were puzzled by the fact that a man who seemed to be aligned with them writes in such a repellent style.

The result of this was that Lewis lost support on either side of the divide because each assumed that he was the pet of the other. Avant garde intellectuals thought him to be in the philistine's pocket, and the philistines assumed him to be the idol of the closed and adoring intellectual world. Punished on all sides Lewis would now lurch about badly, his isolation being reflected in the fact that of his next two major publications, "The Diabolical Principle", which appeared as an essay in the *Enemy*,³¹ and *The Apes of God* (I am omitting *Paleface* because it was composed some years earlier³²) one is a demolition of the intelligentsia of Paris, and the other of the London world, as if he were trying to curry favour with both sides simultaneously by demonstrating his objectivity. This policy, too, was a failure and as a consequence Lewis was forced out of the literary élite into political commentary and magazine journalism, at least in part because one way of responding to a social environment which rejects you is to agitate for its transformation.

1. Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (Eyre & Spottiswood: London, 1937), 252.
2. Interview with the author, 13 February 1992. Mr. Hardiment very kindly agreed to see me at short notice, and generously allowed me to breach normal table manners by taking notes with one hand while eating lunch with the other.
3. *The Childermass* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1928).
4. Quoted in Mary F. Daniels, *Wyndham Lewis: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscript Material in the Department of Rare Books Cornell University Library* (Cornell University Library: Ithaca, 1972), 114. Paul Edwards has kindly shown me a transcription of the entire letter, which seems to indicate that the script contained, at the least, sections corresponding to *The Art of Being Ruled* and *The Lion and the Fox*.
5. Timothy Materer, ed, *Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis* (New Directions: New York; Faber: London, 1985), 145.
6. The "Joint" papers are now in Cornell University Library. A misleadingly mild selection has been published by Hugh Kenner, who assumes them to be definitely part of "The Man of the World, in *Agenda*, 7-8/3-1 (Autumn-Winter 1969-70). A new, and full, gathering of these extraordinary drafts and fragments, is at present being assembled by Geoffrey Gilbert, Stephen Watson, and myself, and will be published by Skate Press in 1993.
7. "The Wanderer and his Shadow", number 14, trans R.J. Hollingdale, *Human, All Too Human* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986), 307-8. The entire epigraph is relevant, but the opening sentences will adequately represent it:

Let us hope there really are more spiritual beings than men are, so that all the humour shall not go to waste that lies in the fact that man regards himself as the goal and purpose of the existence of the whole universe and that mankind will not seriously rest satisfied with itself as anything less than the accomplisher of a universal mission. If a god created the world then he created men as the *apes of god*, so always to have on hand something to cheer him up in his all-too-protracted eternities. The music of the spheres encompassing the earth would then no doubt be the mocking laughter of all other creatures encompassing man.

8. *The Art of Being Ruled* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1926). *Tarr* (Knopf: New York, 1918; Egoist Press: London, 1918). Lewis issued three numbers of his periodical *The Enemy* between 1927 and 1929. *The Lion and the Fox* (Grant Richards: London, 1927). *Time and Western Man* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1927).
9. *The Wild Body* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1927).
10. *Bookman*, 67/4 (June 1928), 463.
11. "Wyndham Lewis", *Aberdeen Press*, 6 February 1927. Many reviews have been

traced through the Chatto & Windus clipping albums at Reading University Library. In some cases, such as this one, I have been unable to check the original source, so my citation remains, as yet, incomplete.

12. Amabel Williams-Ellis, "Something Very Horrid: Books, Ancient and Modern, Romantic and Scientific, That Are Devoted to the Gentle Art of Shocking the Reader", *Vogue*, 71/1 (11 Jan. 1928), 39.
13. All information drawn from the ledgers of Chatto & Windus, now held by Manuscripts Department of Reading University Library.
14. It is not known how to identify the various editions of the circular, or whether they differ substantially. I quote from that tucked into I. A. Richards's copy of *The Childermass*, now in the Old Library of Magdalene College, Cambridge.
15. Substantial bibliographies of criticism will be found in Bradford Morrow and Bernard Lafourcade, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Wyndham Lewis* (Black Sparrow Press: Santa Barbara, 1978), and in Jeffrey Meyers, "Wyndham Lewis: A Bibliography of Criticism 1912-1980", *Bulletin of Bibliography*, 37/1 (Jan.-Mar. 1980), 33-52. My own checklist, which corrects and supplements these groundbreaking works, is forthcoming.
16. Raymond Mortimer, "New Novels", *Nation & Athenaeum*, 43/12 (23 June 1928), 396.
17. Gerald Gould, "New Novels: Stevenson and the Moderns", *Observer*, 24 June 1928.
18. Gerald Gould, "Novels and Short Stories: The Mystery of Mr. Wyndham Lewis", *Daily News*, 25 June 1928, p. 4.
19. Howell Davies, "Wyndham Lewis—And Others", *Star*, 29 June 1928.
20. Ralph Straus, "New Fiction", *Sunday Times*, 1 July 1928, p. 9.
21. Anon, "A Satiric Intelligence", *Birmingham Post*, 6 July 1928.
22. Alan Kemp, "The Literary Lounger", *The Sketch*, 143/1850 (11 July 1928), 89-90.
23. I have been unable to trace a copy of this novel.
24. See Geoffrey Grigson, *Recollections: Mainly of Writers and Artists* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1984).
25. Anon, "Unrecommended Pages: Alex's Journal", *This Quarter*, No. 4 (Spring 1929), 281-91. Possibly by Robert McAlmon. I am grateful to Paul Edwards for bringing this piece to my attention.
26. L. P. Hartley, "New Fiction", *Saturday Review*, 146/3796 (28 July 1928), 126-7.
27. Cyril Connolly, "Chang!", *New Statesman*, 31/793 (7 July 1928), 426-7. Mary Agnes Hamilton, "Life as a Whole", *Time and Tide*, 9/28 (13 July 1928), 683. Alan Clutton-Brock, "New Novels: The Childermass", *Times Literary Supplement*, 27/1381 (19 July 1928), 534 (The authorship of this anonymous review has been established during research in the archives of the TLS now held by the Group Records Department of News International plc, by whose kind permission the information is now published. My thanks to the curator, Melanie Aspey, for her assistance during my visits to the collection.) W. H. Helm, "Books", *English Review*, 47/ (Aug. 1928), 243-4. E.E.P., "Reviews: Fiction", *Cambridge Review*, 50/1226

- (30 Nov. 1928), 175. T.W., "Reading With Tears", *Granta*, 38/847 (2 Nov. 1928), 87.
 J. D. Beresford, "The Strange Necessity", *The New Adelphi*, 2/2 (Dec. 1928), 173-4. Lawrence Morris, "The Gist of Wyndham Lewis", *The New Republic*, 57/732 (12 Dec. 1928), 111-112.
28. *The Human Age* (Methuen: London, 1955).
 29. *Snooty Baronet* (Cassell: London, 1932).
 30. "First Aid to the Enemy", *transition*, No. 9 (Dec. 1927), 164.
 31. "The Diabolical Principle", *Enemy*, No. 3 (1929), 9-84.
 32. *Paleface* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1929), was first published in *The Enemy*, No. 2 (1927), 5-112.